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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000999

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SA/INS
LONDON FOR POL - GURNEY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [NP](#)

SUBJECT: NEPALI KING ASKS PARTY LEADERS FOR CONSENSUS
CANDIDATE TO HEAD NEW GOVERNMENT

REF: A. KATHMANDU 0991

[B](#). KATHMANDU 0961

Classified By: CDA ROBERT K. BOGGS. REASON: 1.5 (B,D).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Breaking with past practice, Nepal's King Gyanendra convoked on May 30 leaders of the seven parties that had held seats in the last Parliament to offer them an opportunity to constitute a new, more broadly-based government (Ref A). The King assured the leaders that a new Prime Minister would be vested with full executive authority. According to a well-placed Palace source, the meeting failed to produce a consensus candidate to head a new government. The King has given the parties 72 hours in which to provide him the name of a consensus candidate (or, failing that, names of several candidates from which he could choose) that they would accept as the new Prime Minister. He ruled out the possibility of restoring the Parliament that was dissolved one year ago. The King's actions, as reported, appear to reflect a good-faith effort to form the all-party government with full executive powers that the Parliamentary parties have been demanding. It remains to be seen whether the contentious parties can overcome their typical preoccupation with personal and partisan self-interest to agree on a candidate. End summary.

CONSENSUS ELUDES PARTY HEADS

[1](#)2. (C) Early on the morning of May 31, Prabhakar Rana, King Gyanendra's confidant, called the Charge to offer a read-out "from the horse's mouth" on the King's May 30 meeting with party leaders (Ref A). The meeting, which lasted two-and-a-half hours, was attended by leaders of the seven Parliamentary parties, including leaders of two factions that have splintered from their main party leadership since the dissolution of Parliament last May. The King reportedly opened the meeting, called to help form a new all-party government, by requesting that the leaders focus on the "process" of choosing a leader rather than on the particular "personality" that might be chosen. He also emphasized that he would confer on the new government full executive powers.

[1](#)3. (C) According to Rana's account, the party leaders, the King's plea notwithstanding, immediately zeroed in on "personalities," with the leaders of the two largest parties objecting strenuously to the presence of the leaders of the splinter factions of the Nepal Sadbhavana Party and the Nepali Congress (Democratic). Nepali Congress President G.P. Koirala and Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (UML) General Secretary Madhav Nepal claimed that since their parties, along with the People's Front Nepal and the Peasants and Workers Party, represent three-fourths of the seats in Parliament, formation of the new government should be left to them. The King responded that since the parties had been pressing for an all-party government, all of the parties represented in the last Parliament should be involved.

[1](#)4. (C) Nepali Congress leader Koirala proposed that the King reinstate Parliament, with the head of the UML (which would now hold the majority in Parliament) as the new Prime Minister. The proposal reportedly brought a clamor of counter-demands for consideration of their own candidacy from other leaders present. Nepali Congress (Democratic) leader Sher Bahadur Deuba said that as PM during the last Parliament, he should be reappointed Prime Minister if Parliament were to be reinstated. National Democratic Party President Pashupati SJB Rana argued that since his party alone has observed the Constitution and not agitated against the King, he should be appointed Prime Minister. Nepal Sadbhavana leader and current Deputy Prime Minister Badri Prasad Mandal contended that all of the other Parliamentary parties had violated the Constitution by calling for the postponement of elections. He then put forward his own name as the most suitable candidate. (Note: Mandal is on somewhat shaky ground here. The Nepal Sadbhavana did not oppose the postponement of elections in October. Since then,

however, the party has splintered, and Mandal is apparently trying to represent his splinter as not agreeing to the postponement. End note.)

72-HOUR DEADLINE FOR CONSENSUS

15. (C) According to Rana, the King categorically ruled out any possibility of reconvening Parliament as "unconstitutional." (Note: The Supreme Court has ruled that the dissolution was constitutional. End note.) He then gave the parties a 72-hour deadline in which to present him with the name of a consensus candidate for Prime Minister. Should the seven parties be unable to settle on a single name, he gave them the alternative of proposing a slate of several names from which he might choose. He cautioned them, however, not to ask him to take any "unconstitutional" steps (which we interpret as a warning that he will not accept requests to reconvene Parliament).

COMMENT

16. (C) The King's actions, as reported, appear to reflect a good-faith effort to form the all-party government with full executive authority that the parties have been demanding and that we (and other embassies) have been pressing. His move has clearly shifted the burden for positive movement toward more representative government squarely onto the parties. Given the parties' abysmal track record for collaboration and cooperation--and the debilitating animosity between several of the more prominent personalities--it remains to be seen whether they can achieve the consensus necessary within the time given. We will continue to engage with party members to urge them to take advantage of the King's initiative.

BOGGS